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# Child Sacrifice: myth or reality?

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## ABSTRACT

The paper makes an effort to define, contextualise and present cases of child sacrifice and some of its drivers. It argues that child mutilation and sacrifice is not a myth but rather an emerging unfortunate reality in some communities in Uganda and other parts of Africa. The paper also presents the historical overview, theoretical, policy and programming implications of the phenomenon of child mutilation and sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Sacrifice; mutilation; child protection; theoretical and programming issues

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“How is it possible that ordinary people kill someone in cold blood and as if it wasn’t enough, they remove things from the body as if they were removing giblets from a chicken” (sister of victim, whose genital organs were removed, cited in Fellows, 2010: 1)*

Child protection as a concept and practice has gained a lot of attention and importance in the last two decades. It is reflected both in the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many countries all over the world including those in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have made significant strides towards domestication of the UNCRC and MDGs through enactment of policies, programmes and services that foster child protection.

However, in the last ten years, there have been a rise in reported cases of child mutilation and “sacrifice”, and organ trafficking (Bukuluki, 2009; Fellows, 2010), which contravenes the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (Igwe, 2012). Organ trafficking refers to transportation or movement of a body part, blood or tissue, either across a border or within a country for the purpose of sale, commercial transaction or harmful traditional practice (Fellows, 2010).

In this book, human/child sacrifice” refers to the murder and mutilation of human beings for myriad purposes including organ trafficking, ritual and ‘traditional’ practices such as cleansing, witchcraft, protection from evil spirits, strengthening the effectiveness of traditional medicine, healing infertility, increasing and preserving wealth, securing marital-sexual relationships and assets (see also Fellows, 2010). Our definition shares a lot in common with the definition adopted by the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Child Sacrifice (2013). This TWG combines both child sacrifice and mutilation of children. It states that: “child Sacrifice

and the mutilation of children is the harmful practice of removing a child's body parts, blood or tissue while the child is alive. These body parts, blood or tissue are worn, buried, concealed or consumed in the belief they will benefit an individual, family or community. This practice often results in the death of the Child”.

In the East and Southern Africa regions, the numbers of child mutilations and or child sacrifice seems to be on the increase (Bukuluki, 2009; Fellows, 2010; Igwe, 2012). Reports from Kenya especially in the Coastal area of Mombasa indicate that twenty (20) adolescents are reported to have disappeared in the year 2012 in what police link to “ritual murder<sup>1</sup> of children” (Religious News Blog.Com, 2012). In Uganda, in almost all major news papers stories of child sacrifice have become a common theme. In 2006, the Uganda Police reports revealed that there were 25 cases of child “sacrifice”. In 2008, 25 cases were recorded, of which 18 cases involved children. In 2009 and 2010, 29 and 14 of child “sacrifice” were reported respectively (Uganda Police, 2011).

According to ANPPCAN (2009), close to 3000 children disappear from their homes annually; the plight for the majority of these children is never known nor documented. There is suspicion among child protection activists that some of the children reported as disappearance cases are eventually murdered and their parts used under the mythology of beliefs that children parts can be used to address different types of issues including overcoming illness, gaining wealth, obtaining blessings from ancestors, protection, initiation, assisting with conception and dictating the gender of child (Simon Fellows, 2013; Bukuluki, 2009).

It is also believed that not all cases are actually reported to police, and as such, the exact magnitude of the problem remains to be ascertained (Bukuluki, 2009). Every week, there is a case of murder related to child sacrifice that is mentioned in the Ugandan media. Interactions with stakeholders especially at the community level indicated higher perception of the prevalence and magnitude of child sacrifice cases compared to what is currently being reported and investigated by Police. A recent study by Simon Fellows also observed that there are more cases than what might be reported to the Police. He noted that:

“... during fieldwork of two months, the research team visited 25 communities in central, western and eastern districts...these 25 communities generated 140 firsthand interviews concerning 77 different cases where bodies had been seen with body parts , blood or tissue missing, or body parts, blood or tissue had been seen after being removed from a body...in this report, the term firsthand is defined as an informant who has: seen a mutilated body with body parts, blood or tissue missing; seen a body part, blood or tissue separate from a body; been exposed to an attack where body parts, blood or tissue have either been removed or attempted to be removed; used body parts, blood or tissue for harmful practices; confessed to killing a person/persons for the purpose of removing their body parts, blood or tissue” (Fellows, 2013: 17)

There is a belief within the community, that child sacrifice incidents usually involve collaboration between two or more parties. These parties include the person intending to sacrifice, an agent hired to execute the kidnapping or trafficking of a child to be sacrificed and a ritual facilitator who is almost in all cases a fraudulent traditional healer who claims to be a spiritualist with supernatural powers.

Similar reports have been found in Mozambique and South Africa. For example, a study by Fellows (2010: 5) found that more than 65 % of all interviews contained a personal,

<sup>1</sup> Ritual murder is the “killing of a human being for religious purposes, repeated in specific circumstances in a prescribed fashion” (Schultz, 2010: 518).

eyewitness account that made confessions describing experiences of victims and perpetrators. Results of this study confirmed that specific body parts are actively sought from live victims in exchange for money and goods for the purpose of witchcraft and other harmful 'traditional' practices. The study also found that "body parts of victims are not only traded locally, but are also often transported across borders of various countries where there is demand" (Fellows, 2010: 5). More than half (70 %) of people surveyed by Fellows (2008, 2010: 5) in Mozambique and South Africa believed "that body parts make traditional medicine more effective in solving many problems ranging from poverty to health".

## 2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPTS OF SACRIFICE AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

Sacrifice has existed for centuries. The practice of sacrifice pre-dates biblical times. It is clear from biblical readings in the Old Testament that both in Israel and among the nations surrounding Israel, sacrifice was a common phenomenon. Besides, the nations surrounding the nation of Israel had well developed and highly religious themes and rituals among which were the sacrificial systems. Similarly, Filihia (1999) wrote historical accounts and narratives of rituals of sacrifice in Early Post-European Contact Tonga and Tahiti. For example, in Tonga, rituals were performed to honor various gods in the Tongan pantheon, while in Tahiti, rituals had become oriented to one particular god, '*Oro*'; the god of war (Filihia, 1999: 16). Filihia noted that in Tonga and Tahiti, sacrifice was used as tool of power and authority, albeit couched in religious terms. Rituals are not static and can be changed from time to time. As an aspect of culture, rituals are dynamic, relative and reproducible. Filihia (1999: 16) noted that rituals may be transformed and that the "definition of ritual is no longer limited to sacred only, and is allowed to work out its meanings in everyday life".

Often times, it is a daunting task to differentiate between human sacrifice and offering and some people may opt to use them interchangeably. Malefijt, (1989) cited by Filihia (1999) made significant strides in attempting to differentiate human sacrifice from offering. The term human sacrifice is used to refer to "the slaughter or mutilation of human beings, while the term offering is used to refer to gifts of material objects such as food, handicrafts and so on" (see Illinois, 1989: 209). Similarly, Labuscagne (2004 cited by Fellows, 2010: 59) explains that ritual or sacrificial murder, both terms used to refer to the same thing by lay-people, occur in a variety of "beliefs such as Satanism, voodoo, or other African beliefs". They are intended to "to offer the life of an individual to appease or win favour with a deity". (Fellows, 2010: 49). Girard (cited by Filihia, 1999: 17) notes that victims of human sacrifice are usually outcasts within their society, describing them as 'exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants'; concluding that sacrifice is 'primarily an act of violence without risk of revenge' because the sacrificial victim is "the creature we can strike down without fear of reprisal, since he (or she) lacks a champion"<sup>2</sup>.

Filihia (1999: 6) observed that human sacrifice manifested in form of the cutting off of finger joints was common in both Tonga and Tahiti. "As early as 1643, some old women would be seen without both little fingers and the young ones kept one little finger; while some old men alike had the little fingers cut off" (Filihia, 1999: 6). It has been noted that it seemed to be a normal cultural practice in the Tongan society for wives of the chiefs to become victims of ritual sacrifice; "on the death of some Tongan Chiefs, their wives were victims of sacrifice,

<sup>2</sup> This may explain why children and albinos are victims of sacrifice in Uganda and Tanzania respectively

being strangled on the death of their husbands, and buried together with them” (Filihia, 1999: 15). Filihia (1999: 7) cites the account of William Mariner, where he wrote that; ‘nothing is more common in these islands than the sacrifice of a little finger, the occasion of the illness of a superior relation; insomuch, that there is scarcely a grown-up person (unless a very great chief who can have but few superior relations) but who has lost the little finger of both hand’ (Martin cited in Filihia, 1999: 7).

“Whilst finger sacrifice may not be considered a state ritual as it seems to have been common among all classes of the population, human sacrifice was clearly a political as well as sacred rite, in which the life of one or more members of the lower classes, or a child, was sacrificed for the benefit of a member of the chiefly class” (Filihia, 1999: 7). Human victims were always demanded to appease the anger of the gods (Filihia, 1999: 9). The anger of the gods was often made known through the medium of a priest.<sup>3</sup> Mariner cited in Filihia (1999: 12) clearly demonstrates that children were a major target of sacrifice. “The body of the child was presented to several god houses, and at each the god was prayed to; the figure sacrifices having failed, three or four children were strangled at different times... and the invocations were made to the deities at *fytoacas* [fa’itoka or burial place]” (Filihia, 1999: 12). Similar accounts of human sacrifice were documented among the Mayans in the context of the ballgame. According to Zaccagnini (2003: 1-3) “the *ballgarne* existed as an integral facet of Mayan life. Ritual human sacrifice is an unquestionable aspect related to the *ballgarne*. The Maya rulers extended the outcome of the ballgarne by satisfying the deities through ritual and human sacrifice” (Scarborough, 1991: 143 cited in Zaccagnini, 2003: 1-3). In this case human sacrifice had a political function and was a reflection of power relations between the rulers and the ordinary people through the ballgame practices.

In Mozambique, Fellows (2010: 43) established that individuals are desperately trying to escape poverty and the poor life conditions associated with it; which makes them susceptible to the witchdoctors’ offers of improved health and financial situations (Fellows, 2010: 43). As part of ‘*Muti*’ practices in south Africa, witchdoctors make use of the so-called ‘medicine murder’ or ‘*Muti* murder’, where body parts are removed from the bodies of living persons.<sup>4</sup> The intention is not to kill the victims as such, but it is expected that they will die due to the damage inflicted (Ashforth, 2005, cited in Fellow, 2010: 47). A fellow (2010) defines ‘*Muti*’ as a term for traditional medicine and are derived from the Zulu word for tree. Ashforth however, defines *Muti* as a substance fabricated with parts, animals or minerals by an expert person possessing secret knowledge to achieve healing or witchcraft substances (ibid). Turrell (2001 cited in Fellow 2010: 47), provides an explanation by Harriet Ngubane, an anthropologist, about *Muti* murder, in which she says that normally evil was removed by the slaughter of an animal which would open up contact between the living and the dead and its body would be an offering to the ancestors (Fellows 2010: 47). Ngubane, however added that, sometimes the need for the evil to be removed and good to be obtained was so great that the use of animals was not enough and only a human would do. Turrell (2001) while explaining Ngubane’s explanation notes that, “ritual killing of a human was required for the acquisition of extra-ordinary powers and this was necessary to win advantage between chiefs; and then adds ritual murders became more common and out of the chiefly control and became available for ambitious commoners” (Fellows, 2010: 47). Reports by Labuschagne, shows that the witchdoctors use body parts in the preparation of

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *A Missionary Voyage, 167-8*; In Meredith Filihia (1999, pp. 9) *Rituals of Sacrifice in Early Post-European Contact Tonga and Tahiti*; In the Journal of Pacific History, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1999

<sup>4</sup> See Ibid pp 45

*Muti* medicines which “many people use to bring success in business and love” (see Fellows, 2010: 48).

### 3. ORGANIZATION AND EXECUTION OF CHILD SACRIFICE

Child sacrifice incidents usually involve collaboration between two or more parties. These collaborations are informal and between individuals who feel the need to sacrifice a child, agents contracted to identify and acquire the sacrificial child, and the ‘witch doctors’ that carry out the rituals (Bukuluki, 2009). Labuschagne (2004, cited in Fellows, 2010) for example; states that, the witchdoctor will not himself engage in ritual murders or killings, but will send a third party to do it. Fellows (2010: 44) in his research in South Africa, quotes one key informant expressing that:

“I do not think the healer himself will go out to kill... instead some will send people who are very poor and promise them a lot of money at completion of the work... at times the will tell the person who needs Muti to bring a certain body part for the Muti<sup>5</sup> to Work. Some will kill their relatives while a person sent by the healer will kill anyone because for him, it is about money (SA\_P\_I\_9)”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly in Uganda, Child sacrifice networks are solely established to secure the victim for the ritual.

We do not have people stationed to kidnap children for sacrifice, but if a person comes and says, ‘can you get me a child of such and such characteristics?’ they cannot fail to get such a person. (Crime Intelligence, Jinja cited in Bukuluki, 2009)

So many people may be involved in a child sacrifice/trafficking case, but not as a racket. Witch doctors give directives that I want a human being. Witch doctors may hire or use a stranger to catch the children (DPC, Jinja cited in Bukuluki, 2009)

The rich people who want wealth use the poor in the village; they get to know how your head is by first befriending you and then they get used to you. They then make that move and plan together with this poor person and then send him to go and look for a child so that they can sacrifice (Elders FGD, Oyam cited in Bukuluki, 2009)

The informal and short-term nature of these contracts possibly makes it difficult for the community and law enforcement agencies to detect their presence, and take action to counter the impending activities.

#### *Victims*

The agents or the *sacrificers* usually know victims. In many cases the agents know the victim or the victims’ family and take advantage of conditions in the family such as lack of parental supervision or poverty.

<sup>5</sup> Muti refers to traditional medicine which is derived from the zulu word for tree (see fellows 2010)

<sup>6</sup> see Simon Fellows, 2010, *Body Parts in Mozambique and South Africa*, research Report 2010 pp. 44

### *Agents*

Agents are a key player in child sacrifice transactions. These are usually poor people who are paid by the witchdoctors or the *sacrificers* to identify and abduct children for sacrifice. In some cases, the witchdoctors are also the agents. It has been reported that family members, including parents are also agents; parents particularly fathers, have been reported in the sale of their children for sacrifice.

### *'Sacrificers':*

These are the main players in child sacrifice rituals. The 'sacrificers, are the main beneficiaries of the sacrifice and provide funds to facilitate the entire transactions. 'Sacrificers' are an engine in child sacrifice transactions.

### *'Traditional healers'*

The 'traditional healers' execute the actual sacrifice rituals. They are the mediator between the 'sacrificer' and the deity. The traditional healer is required in order to carry out the sacrifice ritual in a way that is acceptable to the gods.

### *Traffickers of body parts*

This is the transportation or movement of a body part, blood or tissue, either across a border or within a country for the purpose of sale, commercial transaction or harmful traditional practice.<sup>7</sup>

Review of newspaper articles relating to child sacrifice reveals a grimy picture of cases of children murdered under the context of ritual murders:

The story of a 12-year old boy, J K, from Masaka who was allegedly murdered in a classic case of ritual sacrifice continues to evoke the emotions of those who value and respect mankind. Court in Masaka recently heard that JK lost his life after city tycoon Kato Kajubi allegedly connived with a witchdoctor, Mr Umar Kateregga a.k.a Bosco and his wife Ms Mariam Nabukeera to murder the child so that its body parts could be buried in a house which Mr Kajubi is constructing in Kampala<sup>8</sup>

In another incidence, JK, a hair dresser from Njeru town, Mukono District left her five-year-old daughter SM with a neighbour, FM, to go and attend to a customer. When she returned, both SM and MM were missing. SM's decomposing body was later found, her two fingers chopped off, and her tongue plucked out. Her private parts were also missing. Police arrested MM as a key suspect and he later confessed that a witchdoctor, YS had asked for the body parts in exchange for riches.<sup>9</sup>

IK was brutally murdered by his father, six months after his birth (in Nakinyuguzi village in Makindye, on the outskirts of Kampala city. Upon returning, home from the market one afternoon of October 2009, her mother found the headless body of her baby in a polythene bag. Overwhelmed, she collapsed. Police later said that the 30-year-old father beheaded his son in a witchcraft-inspired ritual (Mubatsi, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> See Simon Fellows 2010, Trafficking body parts in Mozambique and South Africa; A research project report pp. 10

<sup>8</sup> Lirri and Nafula (2009). Weak laws responsible for child sacrifice. *The Monitor*, January 10, 2009. Available at: [http://www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/news/Weak\\_laws\\_responsible\\_for\\_child\\_sacrifice\\_77995.shtml](http://www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/news/Weak_laws_responsible_for_child_sacrifice_77995.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

In another incident a child [D M] was traded to be used in ritual sacrifice. He narrated:

My uncle sold me to two men and women. I heard them go aside and haggle over the price. I heard my uncle say that he wanted 4.5 million shillings (or \$2,700 US dollars), but the buyers insisted that they would pay only four million shillings. After agreeing on the price, my uncle grabbed me by the neck and with the help of a woman bundled me up into the car through the window. I was then sedated and on gaining consciousness I found myself in a witchdoctor's shrine. DM says he managed to escape after the buyers determined he would not suit their needs. He said his body was scarred, which made him unsuitable for the ritual. It required someone who had not shed blood before, and to those who'd purchased him, the scars indicated that he had."<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the study by Simon Fellows in Uganda contains many cases that indicate that child sacrifice and mutilation is real; not just a myth in some parts of Uganda. I got permission from the author to include some cases in this chapter:

James (not real name) 27 year old brother of the 16 year old female victim in an interview conducted on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2012 in Wakiso district, Central Uganda noted that:

"...her body was found in dead on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2012 by a security guard; James believes that the victim was kidnapped on her way to school. One leg, one arm and the throat had been removed. James suspects that it was a witchdoctor who removed her body parts..." (Fellows, 2013: 15).

In another case Sarah (not real name) the grandmother of a two-year-old boy (victim) who was allegedly killed by his father and uncle in Mpigi district narrated her ordeal. She noted that:

"...in August 2012, the victim's uncle took the 2-year old child for a walk. A few days later, the boy was found dead without one leg, the head, one arm and genitals. The informant says the uncle confessed to her that he was involved in the case along with the victim's father. He confessed to watching the father kill and mutilate the boy allegedly for their business to prosper..."

The other case was narrated by a Detective Corporal. The incident took place in Buliisa district, Western region. He noted that:

"...on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Eliza, a 26-year old female who was approximately six months pregnant disappeared when she went to fetch firewood. The following day, her body was discovered. Her abdomen was dissected and the intestinal organs were cut and removed. Half of the liver, the kidneys, the intestines, the genitals and the left nipple were missing. The fetus had been extracted from the victim, the fingers and private parts had been removed..."

All the stories above are linked to murders inspired by strong beliefs in spirits and witchcraft for quick wealth, promises of riches, pleasing ancestors and protection from evil spirits. The story of the survivors (DM) indicates a growing belief that children who are scarred could escape used for ritual sacrifices. This may partly explain the growing popularity of circumcising and piercing of children ears (adorning them with earrings) as a form of protecting them from becoming victims of child sacrifice (Bukuluki, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2007-07/2007-07-31-voa70.cfm?moddate=2007-07-31>



The above scenarios clearly show that murder of children for purposes of extracting body parts to be used in among other things rituals or for “making the medicine strong” to address the misfortunes of people is real and carried out through sophisticated networks. Despite the challenges with the use of the term child sacrifice, what is clear from the above is that children’s rights to life are being used through murder of children for purposes of using their parts to fulfill the perceived goals of the perpetrators.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD SACRIFICE: HYBRIDIZATION, SYNCRETISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND CHILD SACRIFICE**

This study is guided by four main theoretical perspectives: cultural storage units (Turner, 1969); Social perception of risk and response (Douglas, 1966); ritualisation (Tuton, 2000); and vengeance.<sup>11</sup>

Rituals as cultural storage units (Turner, 1969) with both expressive and creative functions. Turner views rituals as storage units constituted by symbols that are packed with cultural information. Each symbol can be regarded as a multifaceted mnemonic, with each facet corresponding to a specific cluster of values, norms, beliefs, sentiments, social roles and relationships within the cultural systems of the community. Based on Turner’s postulation, the expressive element of ritualisation is a response to the demands placed upon an individual, a group of individuals or a community by the social environment.

The creativity function is embedded in the various innovations that are entailed in the response to a given threat. Thus ritual sacrifice should be understood from the expressive and creative perspectives as social responses and/or coping mechanisms to the demands in the social environment. Sacrifice is one of the socially constructed responses to phenomenon perceived by individuals, groups or communities as grave and extra-ordinary. According to Tuton (2000) people are more likely to turn to ritualisation if they perceive that they are under persecution by a mysterious forces leading to extreme undesirable social circumstances.

These may include heavy and unexpected losses in business, losing a child or spouse under unexplained circumstances. Similarly according to Whyte (1997) when people experience such sudden and strange events, they always ask the question “why me?” and they draw on cultural bound resources such as rituals to deal with these perceived persecutions.

Mary Douglas argues, “individual notions of risk are influenced by a wider cultural and social context” (Douglas cited in Helman, 2007: 388).

In other words, appraisal of risk is culturally defined. Rituals are used as cultural buffers in response to issues that compromise social security and wellbeing. Seen from this perspective, rituals have a therapeutic and preventive function against perceived risk and vulnerability within specific cultural contexts. Traditional medical explanatory models seem to fit squarely into the people’s quest for illness explanations that are culture bound (Bukuluki, 2006). It provides acceptable answers to people who are attempting to question misfortunes that befall them and their families (Ibid). When they ask the question “Why me?” the traditional healers provide them with answers that are rooted in their socialization processes, cultural expectations and relationships with both the living and the “living dead” (Ibid).

This is closely linked to the personalistic belief system which perceives misfortune and illness to be as a result of seen but more so unseen forces such as ancestors, spirits and enemies (also see Tabuti et al., 2003). Although misfortune and illness may have a physical immediate

<sup>11</sup> This is embedded in the grounded theory

cause, the ultimate cause is in a number of cases linked to relationships with people and the spiritual world (Bukuluki, 2006). Consequently, people may decide to go to healers to find not only therapy but also the culturally bound answers to their questions arising from circumstances they cannot easily explain (Whyte, 1997). The paradox is traditional healing and illness explanations, and beliefs in spirits have continued to thrive alongside Christianity and modernity.

This practice cannot be explained using the notion of dualism which is value laden with clear demarcations between good and bad or good and evil, Christian and unchristian. It can rather be better explained by the concept of syncretism<sup>12</sup> which shows that people can find ways of balancing two opposing forces in their fused self. In the public realm, they exhibit that they are Christians and in the private realm, they still have strong beliefs in the traditional/indigenous religious practices and beliefs. This is at variance with the Olaniyan's moral notions of the *sacred* (as cited in Norval, 1999: 7) which has a strong inclination towards dualism and the absolute truth: conceptualized in terms of a "given totality, separated and separable from other cultures with exactness of a puritanical slide rule". In other words, elements of a culture are taken to be non-contradictory and non-antagonistic. This implies that the difference from other cultures is conceived as "absolute, closed and impenetrable" (Norval, 1999: 7-8).

This syncretism paradox can be better explained by the *profane* discourse which "is synonymous with non purity and/or hybridity of identity of any culture." The *profane* discourse "insists on the madness of culture and the eventedness of every identity. Culture is conceived as a complicated articulation of mutually contradictory and antagonistic elements". Norval adds that cultural identity from this perspective cannot be seen as closed and positive but it "exists as fragile and vulnerable – as a hybrid and non pure" (ibid).

The growing influence of the profane discourse, partly explains the sustained belief in spirits, superstition, and witchcraft alongside the dominant religions and modernity. This has fertile ground for practices that hinge on spirituality and personalistic belief systems that underlie the human sacrifice.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is likely that upon this theoretical underpinning that human sacrifice find ground to persist and mostly, children are the victims because of the levels of vulnerability that surrounds them. People are confronted with a myriad of unexplained social problems and they respond by engaging in several desperate actions including human/child sacrifices (expressive function of ritualisation) manifested in different forms (creative function of rituals) that are perceived to help them to deal with their misfortunes including cutting off private parts, the head, the tongue, the liver to etc. based on the culturally bound definition of risk. The organ of the body used for the ritual sacrifice is perceived to have either a therapeutic or protective function against the perceived risk and vulnerability to that particular risk. The definition and extent of the risk determines the object to be sacrificed. If the risk is perceived as extreme within the mythology of "traditional healer" or ritual facilitator and the "client", it may call for human and/or child sacrifices.

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<sup>12</sup> Syncretism as defined by the American Heritage Dictionary is the reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief. This is most evident in the areas of philosophy and religion, and usually results in a new teaching or belief system.

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